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Talking Toddlers: Language Development Through Reading

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Studies show that children exposed to language early in life have social and educational advantages over their peers. Reading is one of the best ways to expose your child to language. Reading to your child will lay the foundation for later independent reading. Reading together regularly can also strengthen the connection between parent and child, helping your toddler feel safe and comfortable. The following tips are useful for getting the most out of reading time with your child.

Tips for Reading to Your Toddler



- Read to your child as often as you can. Try to have at least one reading time each day.



- Encourage independence by offering a selection of books and ask your child to choose one.



- Read slowly to promote understanding.



- Read expressively using different voices for characters and raising/lowering your voice.



- Use puppets, finger plays (like "Itsy Bitsy Spider"), or props while you read.



- Encourage your toddler to clap or sing while you read sing-song books.

- Talk about the illustrations—point to items and name them. Ask your child to name them with you, and offer praise when he/she is correct.

- Ask open-ended questions like "Why do you think the lion is going into the woods?" or "What do you think will happen next?" This encourages your child to think about the story and ask questions.

- Substitute your child's name for the name of a character in the book.



Busy Bodies During Reading Time

Trying to read to a toddler who won't sit still can be frustrating. Be patient and keep trying. Find a few pages that capture the child's interest. Don't force the child to participate in reading, but be sure to try again later. Toddlers love repetition—you may need to read the same book over and over again.

Some toddlers like to stand up while you read to them—others look at a page or two before moving onto something else—but keep the book out. He/she may want to return to the book later, which you should encourage. You may want to keep reading even if your toddler is moving around. Before bedtime, allow your child to touch and play with favorite toys while you read aloud.



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The sound of your voice will be a reminder of bedtime routine and that books are a part of it. Don't assume that because your child isn't looking at you or the book, that he/she isn't interested or listening.

Choosing Books for Toddlers

- **High-Contrast Books** - Simple, bold images hold the most appeal for very young children. Look for patterns (stripes, polka dots, checkers, and black-and-white illustrations with minimal or even no words).
- **Board Books** - For toddlers 12–24 months, board books have hard covers and are often about subjects such as bedtime, baths, or mealtime. Try to find board books with rounded edges.
- **Repetitive Text Books** - These are books that your toddler can follow along with and feel like he/she is a "reader." These books have words or phrases that repeat throughout the story.
- **Activity Books** - Play peek-a-boo. Search for a hidden surprise. Touch something soft and furry. Activity books encourage exploration. A good example is *Pat the Bunny* by Dorothy Kunhardt. A great idea is to include vinyl bath books in your collection for tub time.
- **Bedtime Books** - Reading this type of book is great before bedtime. For example, *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown; *Pajama Time!* by Sandra Boynton; or *How Do Dinosaurs Say Good Night?* by Jane Yolen.



General Guidelines When Choosing Books

- Simple text; toddlers enjoy repetition
- Bright, colorful illustrations
- Familiar actions and objects
- Things of interest: animals, trucks, toys, etc.
- Sturdy books



Resources:

The Child Literacy Centre™. *Reading to babies, toddlers, and young children*. Retrieved February 12, 2008, from <http://www.childliteracy.com/babies.html>

Reading is Fundamental. *Reading is fundamental: Your baby, toddler, and preschooler*. Retrieved February 12, 2008, from http://www.rif.org/parents/0_4.msp

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